

Utah State Courts

Utah Office of
Guardian ad Litem &
CASA

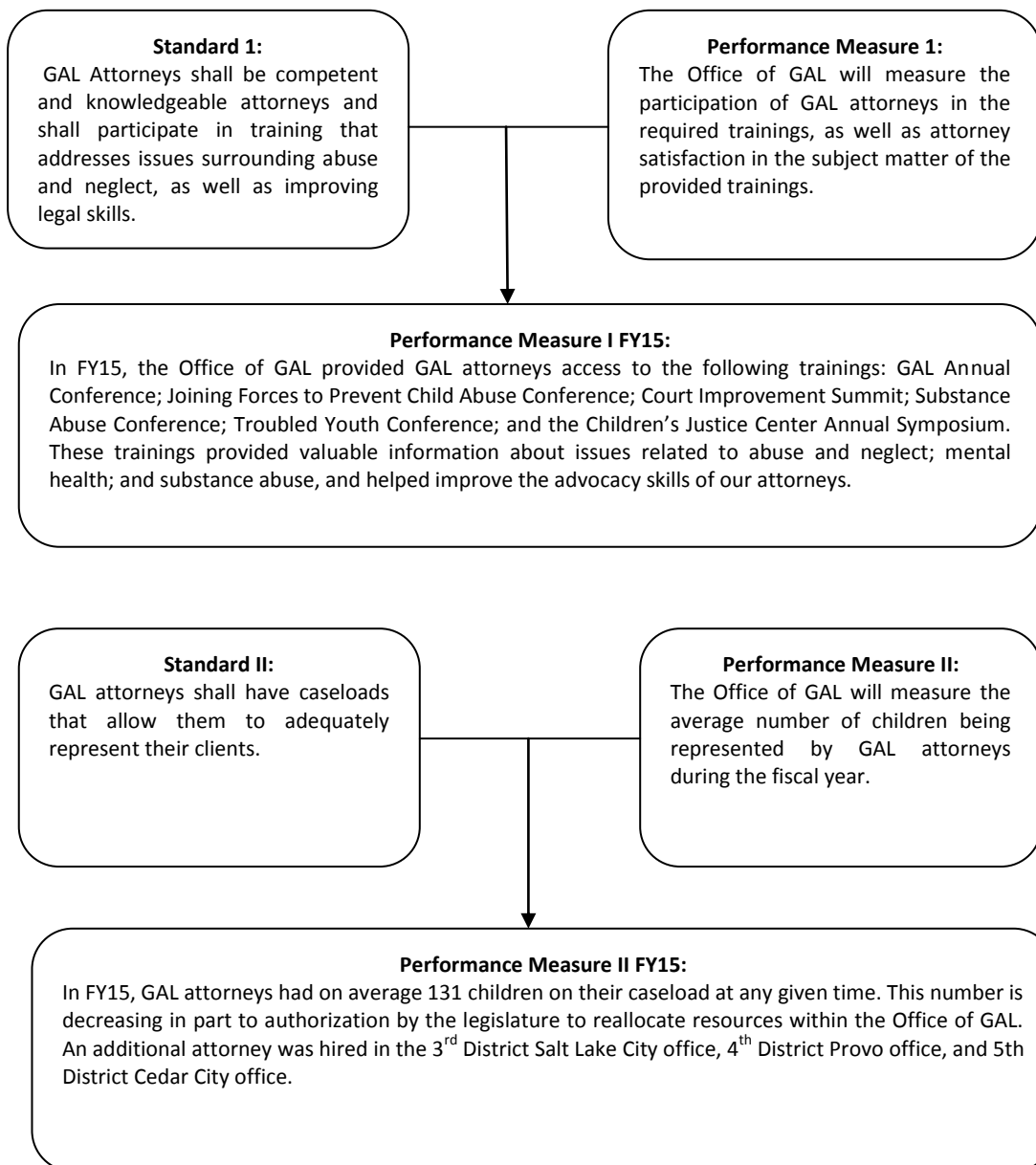
2015 Annual Report

Utah Office of Guardian ad Litem & CASA

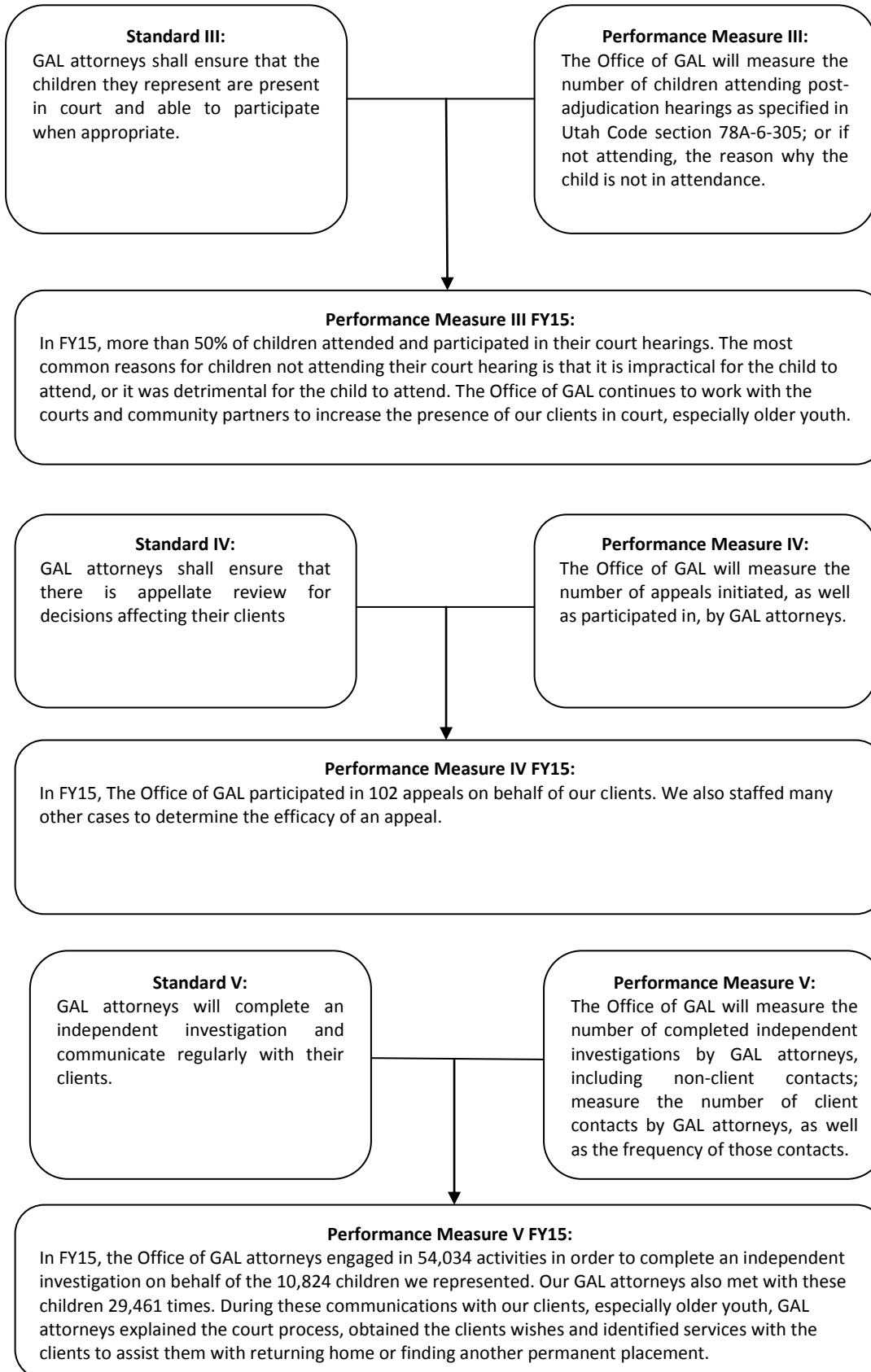
OFFICE OF GUARDIAN AD LITEM

In FY2013, the Office of Guardian ad Litem was asked to develop performance measures and to report on those measures annually to the Executive Offices and Criminal Justice Subcommittee. In FY2014, the Office of Guardian ad Litem developed these Standards and Performance Measures and they were approved by the Executive Offices and Criminal Justice Subcommittee. The approved Standards and Performance Measures, as well as supporting FY2015 data, are listed below.

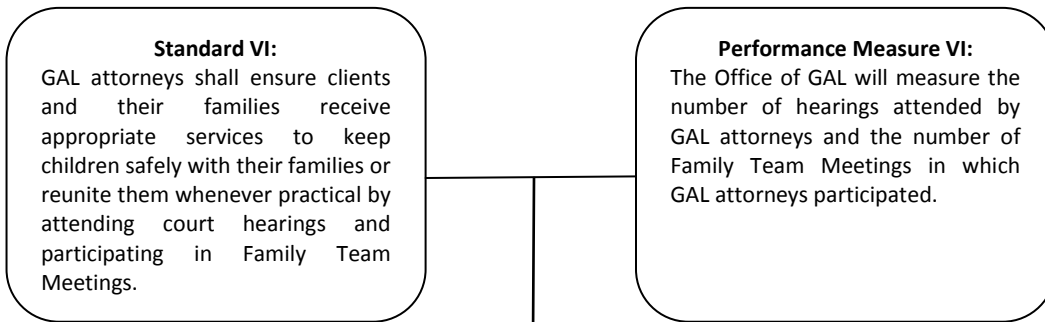
STANDARDS & PERFORMANCE MEASURES



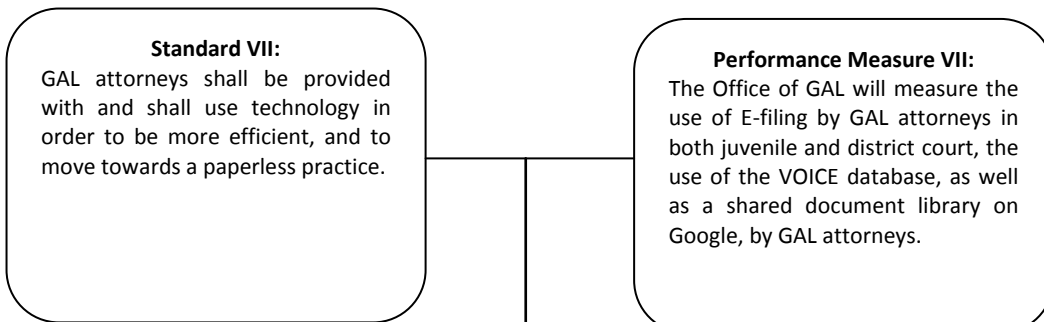
Utah Office of Guardian ad Litem & CASA



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Performance Measure VI FY15:
In FY15, Office of GAL attorneys attended 36,109 hearings on behalf of our clients. During those hearings, our attorneys informed the court about the steps they had taken to prepare for the hearing, their recommendations, including what was in the best interest of the child, as well as the child's wishes, and the basis for their recommendations. Our attorneys also participated in 7,562 Family Team Meetings where we advocated for services for our clients and their families. Finally, in an attempt to resolve the issues before the court, as well as giving families a voice in the legal process, our GAL attorneys attended 2,072 mediations.



Performance Measure VII FY15:
In FY15, all Office of GAL pleadings in the District Court were E-filed. The projected date for E-filing in the Juvenile Court is December of 2015. The Office of GAL is prepared to pilot E-filing in the Juvenile Court starting in September 2015. Our VOICE database already interfaces with the court's database system and as such, we are in a position to transition in a seamless manner. Finally, all of our GAL attorneys have appropriate technology and equipment such as, tablets, laptops, and smart phones. This allows them to access systems wherever they are, to maximize their time and to continue to move towards a paperless practice.

Utah Office of Guardian ad Litem & CASA

PRIVATE GUARDIAN AD LITEM PROGRAM

In FY15, the Private Guardian ad Litem program continued to expand. We currently have 139 private attorneys who have accepted over 208 cases this past year. Jennifer Spangenberg, our Private Guardian ad Litem Coordinator, continues to support these private attorneys by responding to questions, providing guidance, and attending hearings when necessary. Also, the Best Practice Guidelines were expanded significantly, in order for PGALs to be better equipped to handle these difficult cases.

We continue to update our website monthly to keep the list of available Private Guardian ad Litem attorneys as well as the collection of pleadings that attorneys can use and modify up to date. Finally, in an effort to assist the private attorneys comply with CJA R4-906, the Office of GAL has hosted sessions of Continuing Legal Education, and is in the process of making them available on our website for attorneys that are not able to participate in person.

COURT APPOINTED SPECIAL ADOVCATE (CASA) PROGRAM

The CASA program is a highly valued resource for the Office of GAL. During FY15, 776 volunteer advocates served 1274 children and donated 37,264 hours. Advocates are appointed pursuant to U.C.A. § 78A-6-902, subsection (4) (a) that states:

“An attorney guardian ad litem may use trained volunteers, in accordance with U.C.A. § 67-20-1 et seq...to assist in investigation and preparation of information regarding the cases of individual minors before the court.”

CASA volunteers are assigned to an individual case and gather information for the GAL attorneys by visiting consistently with child clients, attending child and family team meetings and court hearings, and tracking the child's progress in school. In addition, these advocates ensure that the child is receiving needed services and is in a safe, nurturing environment by monitoring court orders and reporting to the GAL attorney.

CASA volunteers are carefully screened; they receive a background check and are provided with 32 hours of pre-service training and 12 hours of annual in-service training. Research conducted by the National CASA Association has found that children with CASA volunteers do better in school, spend less time in the foster care system, are less likely to re-enter foster care, and are more likely to have a consistent, responsible, adult present than other children in care.

UTAH'S FRIENDS OF CASA

Utah's Friends of CASA is a 501(c) (3) nonprofit organization that supports the CASA program by providing supplemental funding for volunteer recruitment, training and retention. This past year, the Utah's Friends of CASA Board assisted in funding participation at the National CASA Conference for 10 of our CASA Coordinators.